

The Thirtieth Annual

Virginia Model United Nations Conference

Presents...

United Nations Committee on the Status of Women

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Dear Delegates!

Welcome to VAMUN XXX! I am so excited to be your chair for the Committee on the Status of Women! My name is Alicia Chan, and I am a second year Government major from Gainesville, Virginia. At UVA, I am involved in Model UN, Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship, Alpha Delta Pi sorority, and I am a Legal Aid volunteer!

I love Model UN because it gives students the power to explore and discover the intricacies that define international relations. It gives us the opportunity to try to solve world problems and we get to learn up close and personal how to negotiate and become diplomats, and understand that because of everyone's differing viewpoints in the world, why these problems are so hard to solve! Unlike sitting in a classroom or reading a textbook, Model UN provides hands-on experience that you simply cannot get anywhere else.

This background guide is your first step to researching the Committee on the Status of Women and the topics I have chosen for us to discuss. However you will have to research on your own your country's position on these topics, the welfare of women in your country, and the stereotype women have in your country (i.e. is there more equality or inequality).

I am so excited to meet all of you and cannot wait for what I know will be a great conference! If you have any questions about anything feel free to e-mail me at amc8dc@virginia.edu

Sincerely,
Alicia Chan

Introduction

The Committee on the Status of Women is a sub-committee of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and is specifically concerned with gender equality and the advancement of women. Therefore, it has become the principal global policy-making body for issues regarding women. More specifically, the body tries to promote women's rights in every aspect, including political, economic, social, civil, and educational concerns. Every year representatives from each of the member nations in the United Nations gather at the UN headquarters in New York to discuss the current situation of women across the world and how to advance women's rights and equalities by setting new policies.

The governing body of the Committee is the Bureau, whose main responsibility is leading the annual meeting, making sure all of the objectives are carried out and that the overall Committee is successful. They serve a term of two years, and there are a total of five members currently on the Bureau. Another important subdivision of the Committee is the Division for the Advancement of Women, which

focuses on more substantive help for the Commission and the Bureau such as getting the civil society representatives more involved with the Committee's efforts.

The two topics to discuss at this meeting of the Committee of the Status of women are:

- 1) Greater female participation in business and politics and
- 2) Providing aid to women caught in crisis.

Across the globe, women hold a significantly fewer number of CEO, Board, and political positions than men, and it should be the goal of this body to provide a more equal playing field for women to advance in their careers. During a natural or political crisis, it is often women and children that become refugees and need aid the most, so the second goal of this body should be finding ways to effectively provide humanitarian aid to women in times of crisis. The body should investigate specific ways and policies to implement to solve both of these problems, rather than stating that the body "encourages" and "promotes" these goals. The essential purpose of the body is policy-making more

than a mere public pedestal for women's rights.

History of the Committee

The Committee on the Status of Women was created on June 21, 1946 by an ECOSOC resolution, and convenes once a year for ten working days in New York – the latest meeting was the fifty-fourth session in March 2010. There are 45 members in the committee, each a representative of one of the 45 Member States elected by the council based on geographical location: thirteen countries from Africa, eleven from Asia, nine from Latin America and the Caribbean, eight from Western Europe and other States, and four from Eastern Europe. Each member serves a term of four years.

The United Nations commitment to women's rights first began with the UN Charter in 1945 which calls for "the equal rights of men and women and of Nations large and small". Later, a sub-commission dedicated to the advancement of women was established under the Commission on Human Rights, but women called for more dedication to the issue, and the full-fledged Committee on the Status of Women was established on June 21, 1946.

The Committee is well-known for having more women delegates than any

other UN committee as well as incorporating more non-governmental organizations (NGOs) than any other UN committee into their efforts as well. The Committee fought for gender neutral language during the writing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is representative of the Committee's efforts during its first years: to change discriminatory legislation and bring awareness to women's issues. It also has conducted numerous surveys on "fact-finding missions" to create a thorough portfolio of the status of women country by country. Historically, it has also focused on women's suffrage since at the time of its founding only 25 of the original 51 United Nations members gave women the right to vote. The Committee worked on removing discrimination in marriage due to the noticed discrepancies in national laws between marriage, family, and divorce. Accordingly, it wrote the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women and the Convention on the Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age of for Marriage and Registration of Marriages in 1962.

The United Nations declared the years between 1967 and 1985 the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace as a way to move women's issues forward on the global

agenda. During this decade, the Declaration to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women was drafted. This document is noteworthy because it was the first document to specifically define what discrimination against women was. It includes economic and social discrimination, limiting access to equal health care, education, and humanitarian aid.

In 1995, the Committee experienced one of its greatest achievements at the 1995 Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing, because it significantly advanced the agenda for women's issues. There they wrote the Platform for Action which was voted unanimously into action by 189 countries. "The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims at accelerating the implementation of...strategies for the advancement of women and at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. This means that the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and

men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace." This document was one of the largest steps towards women equality and is still an important document today.

Topic #1: Greater Female Participation in Business and Politics

Statement of the Problem

In February 1946 at the inaugural UN General Assembly meeting in London, the United States delegate Eleanor Roosevelt said,

"To this end, we call on the Governments of the world to encourage women everywhere to take a more active part in national and international affairs, and on women who are conscious of their opportunities to come forward and share in

the work of peace and reconstruction as they did in war and resistance.”

Even in today’s day and age, women in the workforce are concentrated in entry and middle level positions and find it hard to break into senior management or serve on the board of companies. According to the World Economic Forum, Scandinavia has reported the highest number of women in top jobs more than any other area in the world. This is in large part due to legislation in those countries that requires more than 40% of board members be women. In the UK, more than half of the college graduates are women, but only 1 in 10 women serve

on the board of a corporation in the UK. The United States has the highest concentration of women in the workforce with 53%, while India has the lowest with 23%.

Women are substantially less represented in politics as well. In the United States, women make up 34% of the Senate and only 17% of the House, which is actually an all time high for US history. Some countries do not have any women in parliament, including Qatar, Micronesia, and Saudi Arabia. However, the following is a list of countries that have the most women in parliament, proving that there is a wide discrepancy of women’s equality across the globe:

Most Women in Parliament

Name	Percent of Parliament made up by women
Rwanda	56.3%
Cuba	43.2%
Angola	37.3%
Spain	36.3%
New Zealand	33.6%

This issue transcends into women in the media. Women news anchors are outnumbered two to one by men on television, which is only exacerbated by the fact that this number is made up of mostly young women, verifying a common complaint of ageism from female

broadcasters. Women only make up one third of serious broadcasting, and 69% of the time they are discussing soft topics such as health, society, culture, or culinary arts.

There could be many reasons for this problem. Most commonly cited are the problem of childcare, that women are the

main caretakers, and the lack of role models to encourage women to pursue professional careers. Women are traditionally the caretakers and are expected to quit their jobs while the husband continues to work, and especially in hard economic times, childcare is expensive if a woman does decide to pursue a career outside the home. It is an extremely balance of family and work for women that the global community needs to help them with.

History of the Problem

The first main action to come from the Committee was during the Convention of the Political Rights of Women in 1952. It was the first international document to specifically outline women's political rights, which not only included the right to vote, but to also run for election to any office as well as hold any public office or function thereof.

At the mid-decade World Conference held during the United Nations Decade for Women, the committee formulated a Plan of Action with three central goals, one of which being employment. The 1980 Plan of Action called for more women's ownership and control of property, asking nations to take stronger measures to help women do so.

Also during the Decade for Women, the Committee's Division for the Advancement of Women conducted a survey of 121 countries to better understand the current position of women in the countries – participation in business and politics was found to be low, as it is still now.

Work for the Committee on the Status of Women did not stop once the Decade for Women ended. In 1999 the Division for the Advancement of Women also published the "World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work." The objectives of this paper would also be further discussed at the June 2000 conference called Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development, and Peace for the 21st Century." The report showed economic trends across countries focusing on employment and women's influence and positions in the household and labor markets to better understand why women are at a disadvantage in gaining high position jobs.

In 2003 the Committee organized panels of high-level representatives such as Ministers and State Secretaries to help formulate practices, such as institutional capacity building, national mechanisms for the advancement of women, and improving

gender perspectives that focused on promoting women in business.

Most recently, the Committee published in 2010 a comprehensive chart of women in politics. It is a map showing the percentage of involvement in politics by country as well as categorized by positions. It is a great resource tool for further research as you prepare, and it can be found at this link:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/womeninpolitics2010/Women-In-Politics-EN-2010.pdf>

Proposed Solutions

While the Committee in the past has made great efforts to increase women participation in business and politics, more action needs to be taken. As seen above, most actions taken have been writing reports, conducting surveys, and promoting public awareness. Real, legitimate, policy options need to be discussed and put into action. The Committee needs to see more action, less talk.

For proposed solutions, policies could be written into the resolution about requiring a specific number/proportion of leadership positions in the workplace be women. This was a solution taken by Scandinavian countries, and the Committee

could use their policy as an example or guideline on solving this issue. Either a specific number of seats are specifically reserved for women or a proportion of the party's candidates have to be women. For example, "in Spain, at least 40% of parliamentary candidates have to be women, and at least 40% have to be men. Not coincidentally, half of Spain's cabinet is female, because the women are there to be chosen... Some version of the Spanish system would be most workable here, because people would be uncomfortable with an approach that said half the seats in parliament had to be filled by women." This solution of course would have to be up for discussion, as the negative connotation of such a requirement is that women are being given a "leg up," and it can be perceived poorly. The Committee needs to challenge the common arguments that women are less qualified or inexperienced for high power positions. More and more women are going to college, even more than men.

Furthermore, "the culture of parliament needs to alter, to allow women to feel they can take maternity leave... and have the same flexible working rights... 'I've lost count of the number of very capable women I've met,' says Goddard, 'who've said 'I feel unable to do this,

because of what the job requires'. I hear very few men saying that.' She suggests that people also need to take on the media. 'It was the newspapers that chose to devote more column inches to the leader's wives than they did to women politicians.'"

Questions a Resolution Must

Answer

One common stumbling block in achieving any success in the advancement of women is having the support and cooperation of member nations. Resolutions are not going to be effective if they are not put into action by participating nations. Another problem is trying to rid the negative viewpoints some countries have about the equality of women. The reality is, there is only so much that can be done to get rid of stereotypes and misconceptions. People are going to always have their opinions, and it is hard to overcome these.

The key thing to focus on in this problem is specific solutions to encourage more women participation in business and politics. Problems of raising children while trying to work, not enough money for daycare, and breaking the "glass ceiling" for women in certain professions must be addressed. Remember however, these are

only a few of the things that could be addressed within this topic, it is not a complete list.

Do not begin to write a resolution before you enter committee. The point of writing a resolution is to work together as a body, understand different viewpoints, and negotiate – the essence of diplomacy and therefore of Model UN. You can however, prepare statements you would like to say in front of the body or possible solutions to present. These are all highly encouraged.

Bloc or Regional Positions

The regions of the world that have the most equality between genders are the United States and Scandinavia. Yet while the United States has the highest concentration of women in the workforce (52%), it is truly Scandinavia that is leading the way towards gender equality.

Scandinavia has the least amount of negative connotation or traditional opinion that the woman should be the caretaker and stay at home. In society, it is viewed that their women are the most independent as well.

Areas where religion, conservatism, or traditional family values are prevalent have a more difficult time with getting more women in the workplace. All of these factors contribute to a general feeling that the man

works while the woman runs the household. Some areas are even more oppressive than others, such as the Middle East, where women's rights are constantly abused.

Then there are other areas that are so poverty stricken that there simply are not enough opportunities for women nor can the family afford for the woman to do anything else besides try to raise her children and survive. These women have no incentive or any avenue to try to pursue professional careers. This is predominantly seen in Africa.

However, bloc or regional positions means voting blocs, how regions generally vote together on issues. Key points to remember are that Middle Eastern countries typically vote together and support limited equality while Scandinavian countries generally support each other's resolution and are supportive of the most stringent equality measures. It is important for you to know your country's bloc or regional position.

Topic #2: Aiding Women in Crisis

Statement of the Problem

When there is a natural crisis such as the earthquake in Haiti, a tsunami, or any other natural disaster, chaos ensues. It becomes a frenzy to try to help everyone escape from the danger zones, provide everyone with water, shelter, blankets, and food. Because of the chaos, it is easy for people to slip between the cracks and be forgotten. Therefore, the Committee on the Status of Women should focus on specifically providing aid for women and their children as a way to make sure no one is missed.

By making the Committee becoming responsible for a specific group, it will make it easier for the entire emergency aid community to help all the people in crisis, because the Committee is able to focus its efforts on one small subset – women – of an entire population that will need aid in a crisis. Also, because the Committee would be focusing on a smaller demographic – women and children – they could be better organized and more efficient. They can mobilize themselves faster and try to make sure every woman and child was helped.

The Committee has the jurisdiction to provide aid to women in crisis, because the Committee is invested in the welfare of women and their children by extension. This is a way to exercise the Committee's

humanitarian efforts along with their efforts for gender equality. Where we focused on political, professional and more social equality in the first topics – the main tenets of the Committee on the Status of Women – in this second topic we focus on the welfare of women, humanitarian efforts, a tangent of the Committee’s objectives.

The goals for the Committee in relation to this topic should be finding an organized, efficient way to easily mobilize aid during an emergency. This includes finding countries/organizations to provide monetary aid, what exactly the Committee wants to provide, and how they will provide it.

History of the Problem

“Women are not passive victims,” said Ruth Meinzen-Dick, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and this perfectly describes the importance for women to not be forgotten or overlooked when areas receive humanitarian aid, because the well being of women further affects their children and their lives.

Ms. Carolyn McAskie, head of the Office for the Coordination of the Humanitarian Affairs explains and expresses

the significance of this issue best:

“While both men and women are affected by conflict, crisis situations have a differentiated impact on them. Conflict and war are not gender neutral. Thus, eighty percent of the internally displaced persons and refugees around the world are women and children. Women are in flight, adapting to life in camps, or are directly caught up in the midst of conflict. In many cases, women and teenage girls in conflict zones are the sole providers and protectors for their families, since most men have either been killed or are away on combat duty. This situation leads to a shift in gender roles with a dramatic increase in the number of women heads of households.”

The issue of gender discrimination in receiving humanitarian aid has received less attention than the actual development of humanitarian aid, but it is still an issue nonetheless. Despite being a primary focus, the UN has still made several efforts to improve the problem, but more needs to be done. “In 1998 the Agreed Conclusions of the Economic and Social Council

(ECOSOC) Humanitarian Segment, requested the Emergency Relief Coordinator to ensure the integration of a gender perspective into all aspects of humanitarian policy.” Also, ECOSOC’s Agreed Conclusions recognized the “positive role women can play in post-conflict peace-building and reconciliation, stressed the need to integrate a gender perspective in the planning and implementation of activities and recommended that such a perspective be further promoted.”

As a result of these actions, the United Nations created sub-groups to further investigate ways to integrate gender into humanitarian assistance activities. The United Nations has increasingly become more committed to ensure gender issues are brought into the mainstream of activities in planning humanitarian aid and ensuring women participation in the planning, designing, and monitoring of all emergency response programs.

In 2000, the Committee focused on ensuring women had fair and equal access to humanitarian aid. In their report from the 44th session, they specifically discussed the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. Women who lived in areas under Taliban control were experiencing deteriorating economic and social conditions. They were

restricted access to health care and humanitarian aid as well as their freedom of movement to search for aid themselves.

In 2008, the International Food Policy Resource Institute (IFPRI) organized a forum on helping women respond to crisis. Women are vital for society to thrive, therefore well appropriated aid is key. Research during the forum had found incomplete gender mainstreaming within development organizations. Decision makers should ensure equal treatment of both genders in every aspect of responding to a crisis. Women’s access to aid needs to be improved, but there are organizations in place currently working on this issue.

Organizations such as WomenAid consistently provide aid to women in crisis, such as refugees who have been displaced due to political turmoil or impoverished areas with severe starvation. Their emergency food programs provide immediate assistance to displaced people such as in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. They also provide hygienic items and medical help to women in crisis. They train people to rebuild cities after a disaster, such as repairing schools and hospitals, and are one of the key operational partners of the UN World Food Program. WomenAid was even able to reach remote

places, such as some of the highest villages in Europe, to provide food and other assistance during the winter.

Along with physical help such as food and medicine, Women in Aid also provided comfort and support. They set up a psycho-social support center for traumatized victims. As the women told their horrific incarcerations stories of the “rape camps”, the organization decided to create an international human rights campaign called “Tell the World” to bring awareness to the atrocities occurring to women all over the world.

After the collapse of the USSR, WomenAid provided economic and social transition assistance to women in areas such as Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan. Due to the collapse, health and social services were seriously affected, which then led to the deterioration of the health of the civilians. Therefore, they provided emergency food assistance and baby kits to poor pregnant women and new mothers.

This is an issue that the Committee on the Status of Women needs to devote serious attention to, particularly since little attention has been paid to it in the past. Displaced women experience the hardships from displacement the most, because they have to provide for their children without

having access to their farms or business or any resources. Strong policies and plans are needed in times of crisis when the government alone may not be able to help, especially if it is not as strong to resist rebel group attacks.

Proposed Solutions

Proposed solutions can be based and referenced off of past actions that have been done on the issue. Some have proven helpful, while others could have been improved, and all show the wide range of solutions and areas to be covered.

The Committee needs to provide more humanitarian aid similar to that of Women Aid. Providing long-term aid to crisis problems such as displacement, war ravaged nations, economic collapse, or long term poverty stricken areas. The Committee should also be providing aid during a one time crisis or natural disaster, such as the Haiti earthquake or a tsunami. In both instances the Committee should do extensive planning beforehand on how to effectively mobilize their aid.

Along with aid, the Committee can bring awareness to all of these problems: displacement, economic crisis, natural disasters, and poverty. Public awareness of the situations of women in crisis can help

bolster support and bring in more money to help the cause.

Another approach to the problem is legally. Countries like the United States can put more laws into place to provide humanitarian aid and plans of action to help women in crisis.

The Committee should not forget that in times of crisis, women can easily be abused physically and sexually by rebel groups or while in displacement camps, and these human rights should be protected as well. Access to health, food, and education are also basic human rights that the Committee needs to work to ensure women do not lose during a time of crisis or war.

Finally, if women experience the loss of a husband or children, they can also lose a sense of identity, because in some areas a woman's status can be defined solely by her role as wife and mother. Further loss of cultural identity in a time of crisis can affect a woman's identity and how society views her, which can restrict their mobility and access to aid.

Questions a Resolution Must

Answer

A thorough resolution to solve the intricacies of ensuring women receive equal

access to humanitarian aid should answer the following questions:

- Who exactly is going to receive the aid?
- How much aid are we providing?
- What kind of aid?
 - Just medicine and food?
 - What kind of medicine and food?
 - If not just medicine and food, what else?
- How are we going to receive funding for the aid?

In bringing awareness to the atrocities happening to women in crisis, a common stumbling block unfortunately is getting people to care enough to provide sufficient aid. Furthermore, getting the countries willing to pass laws and provide more aid. All of these problems can be addressed, but remember that it is not an exhaustive list, the issues facing women and the distribution of aid are complex and time involved.

Once again, do *not* begin to write a resolution before you enter committee. The point of writing a resolution is to work together as a body, understand different viewpoints, and negotiate – the essence of diplomacy and therefore of Model UN. You

can however, prepare statements you would like to say in front of the body or possible solutions to present. These are all highly encouraged.

Bloc or Regional Positions

Women are displaced in the areas of:

- Georgia
- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Sudan
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Central African Republic

After the collapse of the USSR, the former entities of the USSR are in economic turmoil and collapse, such as Kyrgyzstan.

Other areas such as Afghanistan have seen extreme abuse of women's human rights that require more awareness to how horribly women are being mistreated.

Again, bloc or regional positions mean voting blocs, or how regions generally vote together on issues. Key points to remember are that Middle Eastern countries typically vote together and support limited equality while Scandinavian countries generally support each other's resolution and are supportive of the most stringent equality measures. It is important for you to know your country's bloc or regional position.

Closing Remarks

I hope you enjoy researching these two topics as much as I did! Great resources to use are the United Nations website, as well as the Committee on the Status of Women's website, but newspapers can also be a great resource! However, do not forget that the point of the conference is two-fold. 1) To understand both of the issues and 2) To know your country's position on both of the issues and what solutions your country would suggest. Your personal opinions and beliefs on these issues may not necessarily be the same as your country's position, and it is important to remember that during the conference you are role-playing as a delegate of your assigned country. I encourage you to have fun taking on the role of this different persona! Being able to step into somebody else's shoes for a weekend and learn their point of view on international issues can help the global community work together better. Please feel free to e-mail me with any questions you may have at amc8dc@virginia.edu and I look forward to meeting you all in November!

Sincerely,
Alicia

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